

Service for Learning and Life and Every Student a Graduate



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Northwood School Garden a Community Project

AmeriCorps Members spearhead the effort

The Northwood School Garden is really a community garden, in every sense of the word. What started out as a small way to get students more involved in learning, has blossomed into a community-wide effort to improve nutrition and environmental awareness, plus expand student learning opportunities in building trades, science, and math. "We partnered up with many people in little ways on a little project to create a big one," AmeriCorps member Heather Almer said. Heather, who serves at Northwood Middle School, and Patty Steen, an AmeriCorps member at Northwood High School, teamed up to promote the idea of a school garden as a way to give students a boost of confidence and a feeling of ownership in their school. An earlier survey showed that students wanted more options for learning.

The finished garden at the front of the school will be an outdoor classroom consisting of four 45-foot square, raised beds with covered benches where students can sit, walking paths, and a trellis. Students chose to plant a "pizza, salad, stew, and edible flowers" garden in each of the raised beds.

Spurred by a youth service learning grant to start a school garden, middle school students met after school to plan and design it. Science and math teachers helped students calculate size and what to plant. A parent volunteer did architectural drawings of the garden, and UW-Extension Agricultural Agent Kevin Schoessow helped the AmeriCorps members start a committee to enlist community support for the effort. Local masons, and high school tech ed teachers and students are constructing much of the garden, and to raise funds, parents can



AmeriCorps members Patty Steen and Heather Almer help Northwood Elementary students seed an indoor microgarden.

donate stepping stones engraved with names.

Families are also invited to attend a Saturday "Garden Day" event at which the Washburn County Family Living Agent will lead them in preparing a healthy snack, and they can plant a seedling for the school garden and take one home. Northwood received a \$250 "Got Dirt?" nutrition grant from DPI for the garden and a student has written another grant. Local master gardeners and summer school students will care for the garden, and school food services staff plan to prepare school lunches next fall using produce from the garden.

"We tried to tie as many people in as possible," Heather said. "Basically, anybody who wants to help, can."



Starting a School Garden?

Tips from Heather

Following are a few ideas for enlisting community support for a school garden that Northwood AmeriCorps members found helpful. Hopefully, you will, too!

🥕 Start your school garden journey with a visit to the "Got Dirt?" Initiative web page offering a toolkit, resources, and links to Wisconsin Master Gardeners: <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/gotdirt.htm>

🥕 Call a well-publicized meeting of school staff, families, and community members to answer questions, form a planning committee, and obtain volunteers and other support. Publicize in local newspaper and through school and community fliers. Anticipate concerns that will be raised at the meeting!

🥕 Get teachers and parents on board early with micro-gardens, connections to the curriculum and family learning opportunities.

How to Recruit “Zero” Volunteers

Seven things NOT to do to grow your volunteer corps!

By Betsy Prueter

AmeriCorps members do a lot of volunteer recruitment, management and support. While volunteers are wonderful additions to a partnership program, they're not always easy to get and keep happy. If you're still working on recruiting the requisite 20 full-time and 10 part-time volunteers, here are seven practices you might want to *avoid*, followed by what you *should* do. They are adapted from the book, *Volunteer Power*, by Thomas McKee. For a more in-depth resource on volunteer management, check out the Volunteer Center of Milwaukee's new online course available FREE at: <http://volunteermilwaukee.org/vire/>

1. ANNOUNCE THAT YOU NEED VOLUNTEERS, AND STOP THERE

Just simply stating the fact that you need volunteers won't do the trick. The #1 reason people give for why they volunteer is because they were asked personally!

2. GO IT ALONE!

The entire staff or team at your school or site should be committed to recruiting and supporting volunteers. It should be a group effort!

3. RECRUIT LIFETIME VOLUNTEERS

Get them in the door first with a short-term commitment, and then gradually find out if they're interested in volunteering longer. People can be intimidated if immediately asked to volunteer long-term.

4. ASSUME “NO” MEANS “NEVER”

Just because someone says “no” to volunteering once, doesn't mean you shouldn't ask again later. Maybe it was the timing, or the position, but don't give up!

5. FALL FOR THE “BIC” TRAP

McKee refers to this as the “butt in the chair” trap, meaning you're so desperate for volunteers that you take anyone who walks in the door. Remember, it's worth the effort to find the right person for the position.

6. LOOK FOR A CERTAIN PERSON V. NEEDED SKILLS

Focus on the position; what will the experience be like? What kind of skills does the work entail? Does the volunteer possess those skills? Be open to considering unexpected, complementary skills volunteers have.

7. GIVE A POSITION THE WRONG TITLE

What exactly will the volunteer do? Think carefully about how you market your volunteer needs!



Attend the “Year-End!”

Please plan on attending the Serve Wisconsin AmeriCorps Closing Ceremony on Thurs., May 19, at the Alliant Energy Center, Madison. **Be sure to register by Mon., April 18,** with Laura Paella, DPI, at laura.paella@dpi.wi.gov. Attendance is mandatory, your expenses will be reimbursed, and this is a great way to meet AmeriCorps members from across the state! Check-In begins at 9:30 a.m. and the day ends at about 4 p.m.



AmeriCorps Week is May 14-21

AmeriCorps Week is an opportunity for AmeriCorps members, alums, grantees, program partners, and friends to highlight the work done by members in communities across the country -- and to motivate more AmeriCorps to join or volunteer in their communities. Consider hosting a display table at a community event or at a local high school or college. For lots of great ideas and resources, visit <http://americorpsweek.gov/pages/resources/ideas.asp>.